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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABU DHABI 001274

SIPDIS

STATE FOR G/TIP, INL, DRL, NEA/RA AND NEA/ARPI  
STATE FOR USTR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2015  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TC](#)  
SUBJECT: UAEG OFFICIALS: "WE WILL SOLVE THE CAMEL JOCKEY  
PROBLEM QUICKLY."

REF: STATE 49809

Classified By: Richard A. Albright, Charge d, Affaires, a.i.,  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Senior UAEG officials have publicly and privately committed to ending the problem of underage camel jockeys. In response to reftel demarche, they have told Charge that their priority is to identify, rescue and repatriate the children, and not drive the problem underground. To this end, Arabic and English public announcements have publicized the enforcement of a new law effective March 31 and announced an amnesty period of two months for any camel owner who surrenders underage children to the government. UAE Immigration has begun enforcing requirements that each individual enter the UAE on a separate passport, instead of the family passports, including multiple children, that have often been used in trafficking these children.

12. (C) Summary continued: Senior UAEG officials told Charge that they expect the problem to be eliminated within the next eight to ten weeks. The MFA U/S expressed confidence that there will be substantial progress before the TIP report is submitted to Congress June 1. The Minister of Information acknowledged that this problem is "embarrassing" to the government, and the Minister of Labor noted that all understood that a lack of action on the part of the UAEG would mean they could "kiss an FTA goodbye." End summary.

13. (C) Charge and visiting Deputy Undersecretary of Labor for International Labor Affairs Arnold Levine delivered reftel points seeking immediate action by the UAEG to end the

practice of using children as camel jockeys to Minister of Labor Ali Al-Ka'abi on March 19 and on March 20, to Minister of Interior Sheikh Saif bin Zayed, MFA U/S Abdullah Rashid Al-Noaimi and MinFin A/US for Revenue and Budget Khalid Al-Bustani. Charge raised reftel points separately with Minister of Information Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed on March 19.

Minister of Labor - If Tier 3 "Kiss FTA Goodbye"

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14. (C) Minister of Labor Ali Al-Kaabi told Charge and Deputy Undersecretary Levine that the UAEG was morally obliged to end the use of underaged camel jockeys, because it was the right thing to do. That said, he also understood the negative impact that this problem was having on key bilateral issues, noting that a fall to Tier 3 would mean the UAEG could "kiss an FTA goodbye." Al-Kaabi emphasized that putting children at risk violated both UAE traditions and Islam. Unfortunately, he noted, camel racing with underaged jockeys was a long-standing practice in the UAE and, for that reason, the UAEG needed to pursue a process of education and consensus building to end it. Al-Kaabi explained that some in the camel racing community had attempted to resist the ban with the argument that they were employing children who might otherwise not have any economic opportunities. He said that his response was to tell people to "use their own kids," which he said no Emirati wanted to do. According to Al-Kaabi, his eventual goal was to raise the minimum age for camel jockeys to 18. He viewed the 16 year age limit in the new law as an interim step. The Minister said that he had seen a number of estimates of the number of underage camel jockeys in the UAE, but had no firm numbers. He questioned the data underlying Pakistani human rights activist Ansar Burney's estimate of 5,000 camel jockeys. When Ministry of Interior Col. Fadel Al-Harmoodi (present for meetings between the UAE labor team and Levine's delegation) estimated that there were between 2,000 and 2,700 camel jockeys in the UAE, most from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sudan, Al-Kaabi pressed him on the source of his estimates. According to Al-Kaabi and MoI Col. Fadel, the UAE has taken steps to curb the influx of child camel jockeys by requiring that all visitors to the UAE have their own passports and not/not be included on a parent's passport.

15. (C) In response to reftel demarche, Al-Kaabi stressed that the UAEG was taking action against the use of underaged camel jockeys and would take even more actions in the near future. As examples, he noted that the UAEG would set up police stations at every camel race track to enforce the law. Traffickers (including parents (many of them are brought in by their biological parents) who brought their children into the UAE for use as camel jockeys) would be banned from reentering the country. He stressed that the Minister of Interior would be rescuing the children after the racing season ended at the end of March and acknowledged that the UAEG had an obligation to rehabilitate the children. (Note: MinFin A/US Al-Bustani told Deputy Undersecretary Levine that the UAE would fund rehabilitation efforts.) In response to Charge's suggestion that the UAEG work with the IOM, Al-Kaabi said that the UAE did not have an agreement with the IOM. He stated, however, that the UAEG did have an agreement with the ILO and might be able to have the human rights office of the ILO inspect camel race facilities. Al-Kaabi said that the UAEG had arrested traffickers of underage jockeys. However, he stressed that the UAEG did not/not want to publicize the arrests until after the end of the racing season. He explained that the UAEG's priority was to identify and protect the children and did not want to scare the camel owners into hiding the children, or worse, to try and evade prosecution. "If they bury the kids, we'll never find them." Al-Kaabi also said that he planned to visit the camel jockey rehabilitation shelter (for a second time) later that day with Minister of Interior Sheikh Saif to publicize the UAEG's commitment.

Minister of Information - The Problem is "frankly embarrassing"

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¶6. (C) Charge met with Minister of Information and Culture Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed (AbZ) the evening of March 19 to discuss reftel points, which he left as a non-paper. (Note: AbZ, a key bilateral interlocutor who chairs the strategic dialogue, is a regular visitor to Washington and a full brother to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed.) Saying he had been expecting this demarche, Sheikh Abdullah commented that the camel jockey issue had become "frankly embarrassing for the country" and could no longer be tolerated. He stated that overcoming the opposition of Dubai Deputy Ruler Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid had been a big challenge, but said that Dubai's Al-Maktoum family had now turned the corner and both Dubai Ruler Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid and Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid supported a country-wide effort to eliminate trafficking in underage jockeys. The UAEG, he said was fully committed to addressing the camel jockey problem with the new law that would take effect March 31 and was developing a plan for rescues, repatriations and tighter immigration controls. Echoing the Minister of Labor, he said that the UAEG wanted to avoid driving the problem underground with immediate harsh penalties. He argued that a more effective approach was to offer the camel farm owners and managers a grace period under which they could relinquish the underage boys without penalty. After this time, there would be penalties for those continuing to hold the underage jockeys.

¶7. (C) Abdullah noted carefully the points on the TIP report timeline, commenting that this did not give them much time to work with. Charge urged the UAEG to rescue as many of these children as possible as rapidly as possible. As positive as the UAEG commitment and recent statements have been, in the end, only substantial, concrete action to rescue and repatriate these boys would avoid a tier three rating. Noting that clear and frank communication was one of the strengths of our bilateral relationship, Charge stated that the UAE had lost credibility because it had not implemented its earlier commitments to eliminate this problem. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid had added fuel to the fire by proceeding from a meeting with AUSTRI Novelli, at which he had committed to stop this abuse, directly to a major camel race at which all the jockeys were underage. Charge said that the Abu Dhabi end of season race with underage jockeys on the eve of the new law would create more bad publicity. Abdullah responded that the government could not prevent a race taking place before the law was enacted. Charge suggested that the UAE take some dramatic action like rescuing all the jockeys at the end of that race and to engage with the IOM, which could enhance UAEG credibility with independent assessment of the problem and rescue/repatriation. AbZ took this suggestion on board. He said he appreciated the frank exchange and would bring reftel points to the attention of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and deputy Prime Minister/Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed. Sheikh Abdullah closed by reiterating the UAE's commitment to end the problem.

Minister of Interior - "Message clear to all in UAE"

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¶8. (C) On March 20, Minister of Interior Sheikh Saif bin Zayed told Charge and Deputy Under Secretary Levine that the issue of camel jockeys was a "very bad point" for the UAE. He emphasized that this was the only area where there is a record of child abuse in the UAE and that the issue required government action. In reference to Charge's points about the need for immediate action to avoid a Tier 3 ranking, Saif stated that the UAEG would resolve the problem "within 8 to 10 weeks" and said that "from now, there will be big action" on the part of the UAEG to eliminate the practice. Saif told Charge that everyone would now accept the laws banning underage jockeys, even those who race camels.

¶9. (C) Sheikh Saif said that in the past, the government lacked a legal enforcement mechanism to stop the practice of using underage camel jockeys. He stated that the UAE needed a law so that all parties could fully understand the

complexity of the problem, and that the law that will go into effect on March 31 was based on the experiences and mistakes of the past. Saif said this law would enable the Ministry of Interior to act quickly now that the "message is clear to all in the UAE" that employing underage camel jockeys is unacceptable.

Undersecretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs - "We are serious"

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¶10. (C) In response to Charge,s points about the need for immediate significant steps to combat the problem of underage camel jockeys, MFA U/S Abdullah Rashid Al-Noaimi said that he has seen the new law, which will go into effect on March 31. He noted that Minister of Interior Sheikh Saif was very serious about cleaning up the problem, and that Dubai Crown Prince Mohammed bin Rashid and the Dubai government were now also committed to redressing the problem (noting that there had been a problem with Dubai in the past). He said that the senior leadership of Abu Dhabi and Dubai viewed the problem as a major embarrassment to the UAE and had no further tolerance for delay. Abdullah Rashid noted that the government was "serious" about ending the problem, not just because the UAE wants an FTA with the US, but because such practices were unacceptable to a mature society. Abdullah Rashid listened carefully to the TIP report timeline, and expressed confidence that UAEG actions over the next eight weeks would obviate the need for a Tier 3 ranking. He said that we would see lots of surveillance, apprehension, and penalties for those who do not abide by the new laws in April.

¶11. (C) In response to the Charge,s question about the UAEG plans to assist these children, Abdullah Rashid said they planned to "let them go home." He noted that local charities such as the Sheikh Zayed Foundation and the Red Crescent could serve as the arms of the government in assisting the children with physical and psychological care, schooling, and other programs to assist their reentry into their home countries. In response to the Charge,s suggestion of the IOM as a possible international entity that could serve as an independent observer, Abdullah Rashid noted that the UAEG problem with the IOM was the name. He stated that the UAEG was very sensitive to the word "migration" since the lopsided demographics of the UAE cause concern with phrases such as migration or immigration. Abdullah Rashid said, however, that the UAEG welcomed observation by independent entities such as the Red Crescent. Abdullah Rashid reiterated UAEG seriousness and commitment at the highest levels to eliminate the problem once the season is over.

#### UAE Public Actions and Statements

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¶12. (U) Following Deputy Prime Minister and de facto Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed,s March 14 statement announcing that a law banning jockeys under age 16 from participating in camel races would be on the books by March 31, 2005, the UAEG took several steps to underscore the importance of the new law. On March 19, the Interior and Labor Ministers visited the UAE,s first rehabilitation center for underage camel jockeys in Sheikh Zayed Military City (in Abu Dhabi emirate), an event that received wide media coverage. Minister of Interior Sheikh Saif bin Zayed said the UAE would consult with Australia, Qatar and Kuwait about how to race camels using older and heavier jockeys. In addition, the Ministry of Interior has:

-- instructed ports of entry to ensure that no child under age 16 enters the UAE for the purpose of being used as a camel jockey;

-- publicized the requirement for all travelers to the UAE to have individual passports (and stopped issuing entry visas to children traveling on their parents passports). The English language "Gulf News" has already carried an article about travelers being caught by the new regulation;

-- created a special committee to study camel racing conditions and to oversee the law,s implementation;  
-- placed announcements in the Arabic and English press announcing that the law would be enforced after the season-ending camel race in Al Wathba (in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi);

-- granted camel farm owners who employ children under the age of 16 a period of two months to finalize repatriation procedures for the children, and urged camel farm owners to call the Ministry of Interior's Anti-Infiltration Unit,s 24-hour hotline for assistance; and

-- warned that legal action would be taken against those found violating the law.

Comment

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¶13. (C) Senior UAEG officials have gotten our message and stressed to us that they understand the need to fix this problem quickly and that we should expect to see concrete actions starting in April. The public announcements in both the Arabic and English press, and the enforcement of new requirements for individual passports, are encouraging first steps, but proof will be in the implementation. The reluctance of the MFA to work with IOM is unfortunate and we will keep working on this. Despite our strong urging, senior officials noted that they cannot prevent underage boys from working as camel jockeys at the major end of season race at the Al Wathba racetrack in Abu Dhabi Emirate, which occurs before the law takes effect March 31. We will actively monitor implementation and continue to press the UAEG to enforce its new law and to rescue and rehabilitate the children affected. End Comment.  
ALBRIGHT